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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 CONAKRY 000209

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [KDEM](#) [ASEC](#) [PREL](#) [GV](#)
SUBJECT: PRESIDENT SACKS GUINEAN PRIME MINISTER LANSANA
KOUYATE

Classified By: POL/ECON CHIEF SHANNON CAZEAU FOR REASON 1.4 B AND D

¶1. (U) SUMMARY. President Conte fired Guinean Prime Minister Lansana Kouyate on May 20 and replaced him with a cabinet member from a previous government, Dr. Ahmed Tidiane Souare. Public support for Kouyate has been steadily waning and the public reaction has been relatively quiet, although there have been a few instances of mild public disturbances. For many contacts, the key questions revolve around how Souare will set up his government, how his cabinet will be structured, and how his agenda takes shape. The PM's dismissal suggests that further cabinet changes are on the way. END SUMMARY.

PRESIDENT FIRES PM

¶2. (U) Around 8:00 PM on May 20, the government-owned national news agency Radio Television Guinean announced that President Conte had fired Prime Minister Lansana Kouyate and replaced him with Ahmed Tidiane Souare, who had served in previous governments first as the minister of mines and later as the minister of higher education. Rumors of the PM's dismissal have been circulating for months. The public has been increasingly disappointed with Kouyate's failure to deliver "change," and some civil society leaders have been quietly advocating for his dismissal.

WELCOME DECISION

¶3. (C) Although the local press has been reporting that the trade unions may be planning a labor strike to protest the appointment, Embassy contacts indicate otherwise. Union Leader Serah Rabiattou Diallo told Pol LES that the decision is not a surprise. She did not have any immediate objections to Souare as the new PM, but said that much of the public reaction will depend on how Souare does his job, and how he structures his cabinet. Another union representative told Pol LES that he is "extremely disappointed in Kouyate...he should hang...183 people were killed for nothing." Union leader Ibrahima Fofana is currently out of town.

¶4. (C) Dr. Dansa Kourouma, a prominent youth leader in Conakry, told Pol LES that he has been receiving many telephone calls from youth colleagues, all of them calling for "change." According to Kourouma, Souare is in a position to use his personal relationship with Conte to manipulate the political situation for the better. He told Pol LES that "if Souare can use...Conte to change the situation in Guinea, the youth will support him...if not, Souare will find himself dealing with strikes worse than those of 2007." Souare said that various youth organizations plan to hold a meeting on May 21 in order to analyze the situation and publish a joint

declaration, in which they plan to invite Souare to hold consultations with them before appointing his cabinet. Kourouma told Pol LES that youth are particularly concerned about what the cabinet may look like, especially since he had heard that many former members of government were at Souare's house last night.

¶5. (C) Business contacts expressed similar sentiments with respect to the decision. Sherif Abdallah, who is president of a local business association claiming more than 15,000 members, told Econ LES that the decision to fire Kouyate should have been implemented months ago. Benogo Conde, Deputy Secretary of the Patronat (the one controlled by Youssouf Diallo, not Mamadou Syllah) told Econ LES that his reaction to Kouyate's dismissal is mixed. He said that Kouyate has failed to do his job, but questioned whether the president or the PM should be held accountable, since there were significant political constraints at work. According to Conde, the PM's dismissal itself does not violate the 2007 tripartite agreement. He argued, however, that appointing Souare to the position does violate the agreement because it stipulates that anyone having served in Conte's administration within the last ten years cannot be appointed prime minister. Conde said that the Patronat planned to meet later on May 21 to discuss the situation.

RELATIVE CALM

¶6. (U) There was some evidence of rock throwing and minor civil disturbances last night, but the public response in the capital has been relatively quiet. There are fewer cars than normal on the streets, but shops and markets are open for business, and people appear to be going about business as usual. Some of the international schools closed, but most students were seen heading to their classes this morning.

¶7. (SBU) Late morning reports indicate that there has been some tire burning in Kankan, Guinea's second largest city, and that all the government offices are closed. The Director of the American Reading Room in Kankan reports that large groups of teenagers have been marching through Kankan and throwing rocks at buildings. He reports that one of the windows at the American Reading Room was broken.

¶8. (U) However, other urban centers in the interior appear to be relatively quiet. There is some internet reporting indicating minor peaceful protests last night in N'Zerekore, Kissidougou, Gueckedou, Macenta, and Kankan, but Embassy contacts report little activity. The DATT, who is in Kankan, reported a small peaceful gathering of people earlier this morning while the Econoff, who is in Labe, reported no activity at all.

INSIGHTS FROM THE FINANCE MINISTER

¶9. (C) Ambassador Carter met with Finance Minister Ousmane Dore on May 21 to discuss recent developments. Dore said that he had been asked months ago to consider accepting the PM job, but that he had declined. He told the Ambassador that members of the president's entourage had approached him again just two weeks ago, pressuring him to take the job, saying that the president wanted to replace Kouyate, but was concerned about the public's reaction. Dore declined again. According to Dore, he was approached by Mamadou Syllah, Sam Soumah, an intermediary from Idrissa Thiam, and businessman Alpha Oumar Diallo. Dore said that he knew the decision was coming, especially since Conte called him about it when Dore was recently in Maputo, but did not expect it this quickly.

¶10. (C) Dore said that Souare is not a bad choice for PM. He added that he had seen the list of other candidates and that Souare is the best of the bunch. According to Dore, who knows Souare well since Souare was a dean at Dore's university when Dore was head of the student union, Souare is

a technocrat who understands budgets and financing because of his experience at the Ministry of Finance.

¶11. (C) For Dore, the replacement is an improvement. He told the Ambassador that things were getting "very bad" with Kouyate towards the end, noting that Kouyate was circumventing Dore by going directly to the Secretary General of the Ministry of Finance. According to Dore, Kouyate kept making promises he could not keep because the money was not there. He also told the Ambassador that Kouyate was convinced that Dore was trying to take his job, and that Souare's appointment is a good thing because at least it proves that Dore was not maneuvering behind Kouyate's back.

¶12. (C) Regarding the outlook for the new PM, Dore said that he has seen a plan to enlarge the government, to include 28 separate ministries and two secretary general positions. He told the Ambassador that "some cabinet colleagues will be moving on." The Ambassador said that he wants to try and meet with the new PM as soon as possible in order to emphasize U.S. priorities. He told Dore that the U.S. will continue to focus on actions and progress, not the personality in office.

THE RUMOR MILL

¶13. (U) As usual, a multitude of rumors are circulating in the local press. There is some discussion of the possibility of a court trial against Kouyate for misuse of public funds. Others are questioning whether the decree is legitimate and actually comes from the president. There are several reports of possible demonstrations or planned labor strikes. Information from contacts negates many of these claims.

SOUARE'S FIRST INTERVIEW

¶14. (U) An interview with Dr. Souare was being broadcast over the radio early this morning wherein Souare said "I am not a hero, but a combatant in the service of Guinea." When asked about his objectives and a possible plan of action, Souare spoke of transparency, cooperation, and change. He later said "I wish that everyone will bring change to Guinea in a spirit of calm and serenity." In regards to a possible cabinet reshuffle, Souare essentially sidestepped the question, saying that he had not yet thought about it. When the question came up again later in the interview, Souare said that he must work with the president to find acceptable candidates, which is why he could not respond to the question.

BIO NOTES

¶15. (SBU) Dr. Souare (57) was appointed as the Minister of Mines and Geology in 2005 by then Prime Minister Cellou Diallo, who is believed to be a very close friend. According to archived Embassy bio notes, Dr. Souare is considered a highly capable technocrat. He was actively involved in successful tripartite negotiations between the Government of Guinea, ALCOA, and Global Alumina for bauxite mining concessions. He received high marks from both American companies for his hard work and fairness during these negotiations. He also negotiated and signed the controversial offshore concession with Hyperdynamics, another U.S. company.

¶16. (SBU) Although he was seen as former PM Diallo's ally, Souare appeared to distance himself from Cellou Diallo in the months before Diallo was removed from office. After Diallo's dismissal, Souare was appointed as the Minister of Higher Education and Scientific Research, as part of the cabinet reshuffle that appointed Fode Bangoura as the Minister of State for Presidential Affairs (and de facto prime minister).

¶17. (SBU) Dr. Souare has a degree in geological engineering from the University of Conakry as well as a doctorate in metallurgical engineering from a Moroccan university. He lived in Morocco for nearly ten years before returning to Guinea in 1994. He worked as the Chief of Cabinet in the Ministry of Finance and then as the Inspector General. Dr. Souare is a Peuhl from Mali, which is located north of Labe, in Middle Guinea. Dr. Souare is the cousin of the current Minister of Education, Ousmane Souare.

COMMENT

¶18. (C) Support for Kouyate has been steadily waning over the last several months and it is unlikely that his dismissal will spark any widespread popular backlash. The key question for many Guineans is how the new prime minister will take on his role, and who he will select to fill his cabinet. Contacts, including the French, British, and Lebanese Ambassadors, share the belief that Kouyate's dismissal is unlikely to result in violence. Dr. Souare may be a solid choice since he is a technocrat and not overly political, and therefore may be able to advance the reform agenda. However, he is also close to the old regime and it is unclear where his allegiance lies, or what his ambitions might be. Kouyate's dismissal is likely the first of many cabinet changes, and the population will be watching the subsequent appointments, and the new PM, very closely. END COMMENT.

CARTER